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ABSTRACT

Community colleges have the hardware for using nonprint media, but fear of using the hardware prevents the implementation of media-oriented classrooms. In concentrating on using media in the composition class, teachers must overcome their fear of the equipment, learn to rely more on their own ingenuity and ability, and examine the actual cost of equipment and materials on a cost-per-student basis. Nonprint media can be used in the same way that print media might be used--as a way into other ideas, as thought starters, as activities that put everyone at the same beginning point, and as a means of making relationships between ideas more apparent to the students. Nonprint media offer alternative teaching strategies that are especially helpful to the nonverbal, nonprint-oriented, or even the nonlinear student. (RB)

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SUCCESS AND DISTRESS IN A MEDIA-ORIENTED CLASSROOM

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When Jim. El. asked me to share with you some of my experiences in using and teaching media, I was really quite please. Because while the philosophy and aesthetics are what one must ultimately get down to in thinking through one's own feelings about media and education, what has been most helpful to me at meetings such as this one is the chance to share specific classroom activities---- recognizing that one person's success is another one's disaster, and vice versa. So what I propose to do today is share with you some ideas that have worked for me and some that have bombed and invite you to share your own successes or distresses with media so that together we may learn how to take advantage of these "extensions of human faculties," as Marshall McLuhan calls the electronic media.

What I refer to as media---the films, filmstrips, TV content, audio discs and tapes, the slides and transparencies---are, to me, merely additional modes of communication, non-print ways of reaching people. Never for a moment have I had any fears that the teacher would ever be replaced in the classroom because of them or even that such old-fashioned things as print and conversation can ever be supplanted in education. Just as my electric can opener enables me to do a specific job with greater comfort and effectiveness than the hand-turned opener, I think the use of these non-print communication media can make our job as English teachers more comfortable and more effective.

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The particular aspect of using media in the classroom that I want to focus on (no pun intended) with you today is not the study of media either as a mode of communication for itself or the study of film aesthetics and criticism, or any aspect of film study, whether one of the popular history courses, or even one of the genre courses (such as "The Great American Horse Opera" which is, fittingly, taught by one of my friends in Colorado---or even "Women and the Movies," fondly called Chics and the Flics, that I almost taught this term). Rather, I propose today to concentrate on that aspect of using media in the community college classroom for which I have a special penchant: using non-print media to achieve the objectives of an English course. And, more particularly, I'd like to concentrate most of these remarks on using media in the composition classroom.

I think community colleges, by and large, have the hardware for using non-print media. It's fear of using the hardware that keeps some people from implementing a media-oriented classroom. Over the past few years, I've identified four "distress" areas that I hear about repeatedly.

First, there is genuine fear of the equipment. Anything beyond pushing buttons on a radio really concerns some people. It shouldn't. I am a singularly un-mechanical person. But if I can learn to run a projector and to splice film, anybody can learn how to use any kind of hardware for a media-oriented classroom. Most audio-visual equipment on the market is made to be run by idiots. True, some of it---unfortunately, much of what is purchased by schools---is bad. (The case being talked about so much right now is a well-known brand of self-threading 16 mm projector that chews up film as it rolls along.) But there is good equipment

available that anybody can learn how to handle with very little instruction and practice.

Second, I keep meeting teachers who rely too much on the hardware needed for these non-print media and not enough on their own ingenuity and ability. So what if the projector jams! If some mechanically-minded student doesn't come forward to save the day, there's usually professional help within running distance. It doesn't really matter if there's an interruption in a film. (What about all those commercials the students are accustomed to having interrupt their viewing ever since they started watching TV?) One of my more interesting experience occurred several years ago when we were doing large-group instruction in a room with rear-screen projection. Mid-way through a class something mechanical failed and we had to turn on the lights while people frantically worked back in the AV core to put things together again. It turned out that many of the 150 students sitting there had other classes in these special rooms, but most of them had no idea how things magically appeared on the screen infront of them. So I started talking about the equipment they never saw and students began chiming in with their own experiences, and we had a good time until the machinery got running again. In other words, it's my contention that any teacher who can run a classroom conversation can find something useful to do if hardware breaks down.

Then there's the budget---that major distress area for all of us. Using media in a classroom does, indeed, cost money. And the funds for both hardware and software in media have to come from sympathetic administrators willing to invest in the classroom teacher. There is the initial investment in machinery. Then there is money needed to buy transparencies and rent films, etc.

But we can make the "mass" concept of these mass media work to our advantage in talking about money. Suppose, for instance, you get 10,000 hours of use out of a $100 piece of equipment. That's only about 10¢ an hour for use. Now, suppose you have 30 people in that classroom. The cost per student for that particular instruction is only .34 ! And those are the kind of money figures administrators understand. Or, suppose you order a short film for $25. Show it not only to one class but to several---maybe even using the same film for different purposes. Result? Instruction for perhaps 250 people at a cost of .01¢ each. Why, that's cheap at double the price!

By the way, if your AV director doesn't have a copy of the EDUCATORS' GUIDE TO FREE FILMS, have the library order a copy for you from Educators' Progress Service, Inc. Randolph, Wisc. 53956. There are also other sources of free films including major industries, the phone company, the government.

(Don't forget that your TV set gives you lots of free use, too. And you'd be surprised what you might turn up by liaison with a local TV station.)

So now we come, at last, to the biggest of the four "distress areas" for many people---the problem of what to do with media in the classroom, the "how to" aspects. Let me suggest some possibilities.

To me, the entire compositing process can be paralleled to the planning and execution of a slide/tape presentation or the making of a film. And for most students, either of these is great fun. Filmmaking, in particular, is also a challenge, a much larger one than working with still pictures. While some students have been thrilled about making films, and made very

fine ones, it simply is not a medium of expression for others. Students who want, or need, strong direction in their activities or those who strive primarily to "please the teacher" have not been particularly successful at filmmaking in my classes.

On the other hand, sometimes filmmaking serves the student extremely well. I had in one "Filmmaking and Literature" class a 26 year old man who had great difficulty expressing himself in writing because of some learning disabilities. But he could verbalize ideas and was, in addition, a professional sound man who had traveled with Frank Sinatra when he played clubs and who had made a movie in Yugoslavia and, in fact, was out of school for a week during this class because he got a job working on a movie near Silver Springs. Jay passed his course, although he'd dropped it twice before because the teachers used strategies that hindered rather than helped him. Given the chance to direct his energies to expressing himself visually, with film, rather than with words on paper, Jay did quite well. As a matter of fact, he also began to make progress with his writing by the end of the term partly, he realized, because the film was non-threatening to him and he was able to use his energy to help attack his writing problem.

But I'm not a filmmaker. I know a little about the technical aspects of filmmaking but I don't care very much for the details or the machinery involved in making my own movies. (I do enjoy film study courses, however, and would be glad to talk about them later with anyone who wants to.)

I am more comfortable using non-print media in the same way that I might use print--as a way into other ideas, as thought starters, as parallels, as activity that puts everyone at the same beginning point, as a means of making relationships.

I like to use films as a way of loosening the imagination of students. A frightening number of them--frightening to me, at least----seem to be very literal-minded, people afraid to let go or to express opinions. So sometimes I will use a whole group of abstract films ---CRIA, LAPIS, BINARY BIT PATTERNS, ALLURES--- in an effort to move students to think creatively by removing familiar sights. In many cases, too, these films are accompanied by electronic music, and that seems to help the loosening-up process because, again, it's not familiar enough to grab ahold of.

A film I've had success---and fun---with as a way of provoking imagination is PEOPLE SOUP. It's a little film by Alan Arkin and features his two sons who mess up the kitchen concocting some horrible combination of foods. Finally, one boy tastes the stuff---- and turns into a chicken. As soon as he becomes a boy again, his brother licks a fingertip full and becomes a sheep dog. He, too, manages to get back into his human form---and the two boys are last seen walking down the road to town on their way to buy ice cream cones.

PEOPLE SOUP proved thoroughly delightful to a class last year, so I decided to order it again this year. Disaster! The class I showed it to thought it a pointless waste of time. Nobody once cracked a smile during the whole 15 minutes, and when the lights went on they collectively and reluctantly managed only to get about 100 words beyond "What are we supposed to see in that film?"

Recently I showed the film HAPPY ANNIVERSARY to a class of police recruits as a method of teaching observation. The film is a series of almost slapstick episodes depicting the difficulties of a husband trying to buy wine and flowers for his wife and get home through a Paris traffic jam in time for an anniversary dinner.

I thought the traffic aspect would be amusing to these prospective police officers. It was only mildly so. As it turned out, this group needed less help with observation than I'd anticipated.

What *did* happen with this particular class is that I learned something about observation. Although I've been using HAPPY ANNIVERSARY for serveral years in different classes and for different purposes, some of the men in that police class showed me something I'd never seen before. At one point there is a shot of a barber standing in the doorway of his store. A customer wearing a barber cloth around his neck and with his face full of lather comes through the doorway. What several of those men saw---and what I saw for the first time in perhaps 50 viewings---and *then* only after it was pointed out to me and we reran that section---was that the customer was visible sitting down inside the shop before standing up and going through the doorway. So in addition to the lesson in observations, it certainly was one in point of view!

In another class, when I showed HAPPY ANNIVERSARY for teaching comedic method, we got into other areas. Logic, for instance. Most students could infer that it was not an American film right at the beginning because closeups of the dinner table setting showed forks with the tines down. And then there was a fascinating discussion about language. It centered about calling things by formal or "correct" names and by customary ones. I, for instance, kept insisting there was no butter knife on the plate as some students were equally vehement about. Then it dawned on me that what they were talking about was a butter *spreader*, which is what I happen to know that utensil is called by silverware manufacturers.

Another class gave me quite a start when I showed them THE SIXTIES, a film by Charles Braverman, the man who made AMERICAN TIME CAPSULE. Again, this was in a class of police recruits,

and the idea was that by examining the stills and film clips Braverman used, by studying proportionate time devoted to various images, and by becoming aware of juxtapolition, the future police officers could learn something about how inferences are made. Instead, I learned a lot about the men in that room.

Early in the film when we saw the marchers in Selma coming off the bridge and being met by police in helmets and gas masks, by officers riding horses directly into the crowd or hitting and kicking marchers fallen to the ground--this audience applauded or shouted approval. And when police were shown pounding down a heckler at a Wallace political meeting, they reacted the same way. This was another eye-opener for me! Most classes to which I'd shown the film had reacted quite differently. So I switched plans, and when the film was over we talked about stereotyping and prejudice and point of view instead of about logic.

One unexpected use of media occured in a class in which a girl asked to try out the ability of her colleagues at giving directions. She pretended to be a creature just stepped from one of the flying saucers recently reported; the class was to assume she understood English and to give her directions to take a cigarette from a pack, light it, and smoke it.

Well---the group had great fun. But while they were doing the activity, I was reminded of a favorite record by Bob Newhart called "Introducing Tobacco to Civilization." It's a monologue in which Newhart assumes the role of the head of the West Indies Company in England receiving a phone call from Sir Walter Raleigh in the colonies explaining what to do with a boatload of tobacco. Because of the girl's volunteered activity with the cigarette, I brought in the Bob Newhart record and after we'd had a chance simply to listen and enjoy it, I was able to introduce, and illustrate,

such esoterica as inferences and assumptions and anachronisms.

A film designed to teach children mutual aid and responsibility is called A SCRAP OF PAPER AND A PIECE OF STRING. But I use it to teach the structure of comparison and contrast, because its organization is such that students can easily take notes---another skill they learn while using the film---and then, by following the order of those notes, write a theme of comparison and contrast---in some cases, for the first time successfully in all of their schooling.

The film I've had much fun with is one I sometimes use as an example of metaphor. It's called ORANGE and it won a first prize at the San Francisco Pornographic Film Festival. Most students don't realize they're watching a girl peel an orange until the film is almost 1/3 over!

JUNKYARD is a film I've used for dealing with the structure of composition, with repetition, with transitions, and with other similar rhetorical devices. But one of my colleagues uses it as a stimulation for students to write metaphors.

SHOW JUNKYARD

One of my outstanding classroom disasters was with THIS IS MARSHALL MCLUHAN: THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE. It's a long film---almost 50 minutes---and it illustrates many of McLuhan's theories while, at the same time, telling about, but not quite explaining, them. I asked the students to take notes and then summarize the film. I got lots of words, plenty of trying, but very little real summary.

I knew I'd made a mistake after glancing through just a couple of papers. So I distributed a journalistic article about McLuhan's theories and asked for a summary of that. Again, a pretty bad set of paper.

So I backed up to a simpler exercise. I showed the film BREAD by Charles Eames, which you'll see in a moment. By having students record what they saw on the film, then group the pictures into "idea units"---that just incidentally happen to result in an outline--I finally got most of the class to be able to write a summary.

I spoke before about using the same film for more than one purpose. Another use I've made of this film, BREAD, has been in relation to developing sensory perception and enlarging vocabulary for sensory details. As you watch BREAD, think about smells and tastes and about the ~~feel~~ texture of items you are going to see.

SHOW BREAD

Imagination-proding, observation, making inferences, establishing relationships, summarizing, writing comparison and contrast, outlining, understanding and using metaphor---these are but a few uses of media as a way into some of the more traditional concerns of English teachers. I suspect that once any teacher has determined what he or she wants to teach, it's possible to find a way into that area by using one or more media--and to do so simply by applying the same kind of imaginative discrimination we all learned to apply to literary study.

Last summer I directed a curriculum development workshop-seminar in media and a publication is now being prepared based on the objectives and teaching experiences of the participants that came out of the workshop. There are courses and modules developed by people who teach on all levels, from elementary through college. If you'd like a copy, send me a large, self-addressed mailing envelope containing about 50¢ in stamps. I hope the publication will be ready for distribution by June and from it you should be able to get a variety of ideas about using media--and to learn

a good bit from their experiences of teachers trying to implement their ideas.

Soon, too, you can join an organization devoted to media education which has, until now, been limited to group membership. It's NAME---the National Association of Media Educators---and if you'll let me have your name, address, and zip, I'll see that you get information about what's going on, including our very exciting plans for journals and other publications.

Let me also mention quickly that if you have access to VTR equipment, you can try some things in a classroom, other than using it for students to watch others making speeches or for you watching yourself teach. One successful use I've made of the videotape is, at the students' invitation, to have a class session taped when I had to be out of town. Then I watch it when I came back and didn't have to miss what has been going on in that particular class.

Frankly, though, until I learned that students had to do that kind of taping, rather than our TV technicians, it wasn't a very successful use of media. Technicians didn't know who to focus on or when. They would put a speaker on camera, for instance, when it was audience reaction that was important at that moment. Or, the technicians kept the camera stationary when it should have been moved around the room in order to shoot.

Finally, let me just mention how much you can do with a TV set in a classroom. One of my colleagues had some excellent sessions because her class hour happened to coincide with the airing of a popular TV soap opera. She was able to do all sorts of things about stereotyping, point of view, social implications, inferences, etc. And of course, you can always get lots of mileage out of watching TV commercials as they appear on screen---and talking about them immediately.

I began by noting four aspects of media that often distress teachers. So let me end on a positive note by reminding you of four aspects of using media in a classroom that make for successful teaching.

First, media is not at all threatening to students. They are, probably, more familiar, as consumers or viewers, with non-print media than we are. Certainly, even though they might not be more knowledgable and perceptive about media than we are, they're familiar with it. And many of our students know far more about the mechanics of those things, the hardware, than we do. Which is just fine---because it's not so bad for students to feel superior to teachers---at least, sometimes.

Second, when we use the non-print media in a classroom, everyone in that room is sharing the same stimulus---simultaneously. It may not be affecting us all in the same way, but that's something good, something you can capitalize on. The important point is that the experience is being shared at that particular time, and so we can all talk about it within the same framework.

Non-print media offer the possibilities of teaching strategies that are especially helpful to the non-verbal or non-print-oriented, or even the non-linear student. Since a teacher ought to be committed to helping students, it seems only logical that we should use whatever means we can to render that help. And if the media we've been considering today are useful for certain students in certain ways, it seems imperative that they be used.

Finally, I think teaching success can come from the amplification of our repertoire of traditional teaching tools---which is what the non-print are. Then, it's only a matter of ingenuity that can lead to a variety of successes in the English classroom.

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